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Teachers' Guide

DEPT. OF EDUCATION
HISTORICAL COLLECTION

Professional Development

Language and Learning

Educational Television Branch
ONTARIO DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
1670 Bayview Avenue, Toronto 17

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

LANGUAGE AND LEARNING

15 programs, 20 minutes each.

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INTRODUCTION

It is possible that language has been, in recent years, the subject of more research than any other area of the curriculum — and with good reason. For language, which is our most effective method of communication, is the heart of learning. Without language we are isolated: we cannot discover the knowledge or ideas that others may possess; we cannot, by the leaven of discussion extend or refine our own ideas; we cannot read to discover what men beyond our sight and time have offered for our consideration; nor can we express in a visual form our own thoughts and wishes in a way which can be understood by others. Hence learning cannot be separated from language. And just as language is the prerequisite of learning, so learning — the process of discovery — is the means by which we develop the ability to use language effectively.

The energy devoted to the study of language, therefore, is energy wisely directed. But the results of this study have not always been clearly presented. Or perhaps it is better to say that they have reached teachers in garbled or oversimplified form. The cautiously-worded report of a scholar, for instance, is presented, after passing through several hands, to the teacher as dogma-as-an-absolute. And it is little wonder that the teacher who has been following a program which he has been told is educationally and psychologically sound, is puzzled and even resentful when he is told to change his methods.

Within the last few years a new phrase has found a place within the vocabulary of the teacher. The term "language-experience approach" has gained wide currency — especially among primary teachers. Typically, it has been responsible for a good deal of confusion, resentment, and perhaps even a certain insecurity. For many of us, it means the total abandonment of any kind of structural program of language skills — a kind of "what-shall-we-do-today-children" approach to learning. And we react according to temperament — some will accept this interpretation joyously, others will reject it with some disgust.

Perhaps the trouble comes from the phrase "language-experience". Since it is a phrase totally without meaning, the hearer can put his own meaning into it. If he is suspicious of anything that may disturb him, he will inject it with the "worst" meaning.

In fact, the effective teaching of language does not depend on a radical new approach to it. Research in the skills of language, and the best methods of helping children to learn them has been going on for many years. Its effect is cumulative, and the results of the newest research do not displace the old. They may modify or suggest a shift in emphasis, or enrich our understanding, but they do not necessarily demand that we abandon our current philosophy of teaching. Growth, in our knowledge of the learning process, is evolutionary.

To move from the general to the particular, few of us, for instance, would consider abandoning a program which helped children acquire certain language skills. In fact, the work of scholars in the language field indicates that training of the senses, the developing of word-attack skills, and experiences in phonetic analysis are very necessary. Primary teachers have recognized these facts for a good many years. Contemporary research does not invalidate these common practices; it confirms them and gives them new dimensions.

So, in preparing this series of programs, it is not our intention to suggest that there be a revolution in the classroom. Rather, we would hope for an evolution in the classroom. We suspect that many teachers will find their own classrooms mirrored on the television screen; and for these people we hope our programs will bring reassurance and encouragement. We hope also that the series will offer a challenge to others — to those who are doubtful about a classroom organization that does not include subject divisions, that permits children considerable freedom in their choice of activities, that emphasizes informal evaluation over the formal examination and test.

Although these programs do not advocate a revolution in our teaching methods, they do rest on certain assumptions which may be novel to some of us. One — and perhaps the most important — is the value of the child's experience. His own experiences — in and out of school — are the basis of his learning. They provide the need to learn, they provide the drive, or the interest in learning; moreover, they make the learning comprehensible to him.

Another assumption is — and this was mentioned earlier — the close relationship existing between language and learning. In these programs we will see learning experiences in many areas of the curriculum — science, social studies, mathematics — being used as the vehicle for experiences in listening, speaking, writing, and reading. And, of course, the series accepts the premise that ability in language skills, increases the efficiency of the learning process.

One of the strengths of this series, is the variation in method and approach, demonstrated by each of the participating teachers. For each teacher is an individual who will find his own way to create within his classroom the kind of imaginative and creative atmosphere that leads to a rich variety of learning experiences.

PARTICIPATING SCHOOLS AND TEACHERS

Miss Patricia Ewing
Martin Grove Gardens Public School
Etobicoke

Mrs. Patricia Cleator
Fairview Memorial Public School
Brantford

Mrs. Dorothy Van Oene
Elmlea Public School
Etobicoke

Miss Gail Marshall
West Humber Public School
Etobicoke

Mrs. Jesse Bond
Churchill Heights Public School
Scarborough

Miss Pitt
Canadian Martyrs' Separate School
Hamilton

Sister Charles Garnier
Canadian Martyrs' Separate School
Hamilton

Mrs. Christine Woodruff
N. B. McEachren Public School
Lambeth

Miss Mary-Lou Galinski
St. Mary's Separate School
North Bay

Mrs. Elaine Mowbray
Hunter's Glen Public School
Scarborough

Miss Gail Bagshaw
Churchill Heights Public School
Scarborough

PROGRAM 1

CHILDREN AND LANGUAGE

When children reach school age they have already had a wide variety of language experiences. As babies they experimented with language in attempts to communicate their pain or pleasure, their wants, and their curiosity about the world in which they found themselves. In infancy and early childhood their ability to use language developed rapidly. By imitation, they accumulated a rather large vocabulary. They may have enjoyed a wide variety of listening experiences such as stories, radio and television broadcasts. And it is likely that they have tried to express their ideas in creative form – picture-making, building things, playing. They may have even developed a substantial sight vocabulary.

So children beginning school already have considerable language ability. But this ability will vary. Each child is a product of his experience and the quality and variety of that experience will determine in large measure his ability to use language.

Since the experiences of the child have provided the drive for learning – and have given meaning to what he has learned in his pre-school years, it is evident that experiences will be the basis of the child's learning in his school years. It will be the teacher's task to provide interesting and meaningful experiences in school, and to make good use of the children's out-of-school experiences.

The teacher will remember too, that the pre-school child has acquired some ability to use language, but that he has not learned many language skills. He has not, learned how to recognize new words. Nor has he had any training in auditory or visual discrimination. Language is tied to the senses, and the senses have to be trained.

Finally, language has four elements—listening, speaking, reading and writing. None of them exists in isolation, but attention must be given to the child's ability in each one.

PROGRAM 2

EXPERIENCE FOR CHILDREN

Since experience plays so large a part in learning, it is important that we become aware of the variety of experiences we can provide for the children in the classroom. And just as important as the experience itself, is the response of the children to it.

The best kind of experience is the child's own experience. The things that happen to him, in and out of school, have a real importance and meaning for him, and the opportunity to talk about these things, perhaps to learn more about them, will lead to the best type of learning experiences.

The teacher will also present or arrange experiences within the school environment. Frequent use of excursions, films, filmstrips, imaginative stores, poetry, music will provide the stimulus for individual or group projects in which all elements of language will be used. Very often, an incident in the classroom – an heirloom brought to school, a new story-book – will lead to other creative interpretive responses and activities by the child.

The experience is important, but even more important for the teacher is the child's response to it. For it is this response that leads to the learning activities.

PROGRAM 3

LEARNING TO LISTEN

The child's listening ability is crude and imperfect; the sounds of language are complex. Therefore, listening as a skill must be developed. The child's ability to listen must be sharpened and refined so that he can make a clear discrimination among such things as nuances and pitches which make up the spoken language. The first thing to do is to establish a reason for listening. And that reason may be the sheer pleasure of following a well-told story. Or children may listen because they know that they will take part in a discussion later, or because they want to get some information. The teacher may devise special exercises in listening to train the children in the listening skills. And, for this purpose, many teachers find the tape recorder an invaluable teaching aid. The four elements of language cannot be separated. Thus, many opportunities for practising all elements in juxtaposition are very useful. Play-acting is a good example in this regard. A listening activity which is combined with reading and discussion is examining a picture book.

PROGRAM 4

LISTENING AS PLEASURE

Listening is something more than a skill. Listening can be a pleasure. Intelligent, appreciative listening can contribute to the growth of the child as a more interesting, more complete person. A good teacher then will provide many opportunities for pure listening – radio broadcasts, music, story-telling.

Story telling is a very old art. And for children, the hearing of a good story is a very happy experience. It calls for a response which may express itself in

laughter or excitement. The world of make-believe touches chords within them to which they respond enthusiastically. Poetry touches the same kinds of chords within the children. Its lyrical and rhythmical quality delight the children. And perhaps the most satisfying of all experiences for children is the sound of music — music to which they can respond provoking creative activity and providing an outlet for their imagination and energy.

PROGRAM 5

SPEAKING OPPORTUNITIES

The essence of speech is that it be understandable; children need help in making their thoughts and ideas clear to others. Oral communication breaks down without this clarity. And perhaps the first requirement in the development of speaking ability is practice. But it has to be practice which arises from natural situations. The children's own experiences — their play, week-end adventures with their parents, the welfare of their pets — provide interesting materials for speaking opportunities in the school. Another type of speaking experience arises from the necessity to explain something to someone. The teacher may want to find out what a child has learned during an experiment or what he is working at with a group who are planning a play or project. These situations provide good reason for giving clear explanations. So the child practises the discussion skills, and soon learns that to put his point across he must be able to marshall his thoughts for clear and persuasive expression. He probably could identify the skill — which is not important at this stage — but he learns how to use it. Speaking involves a choice of words; putting these words together into sentences; putting sentences together in reasonable order so that a thought is developed. But it also involves helping the child to put his own thoughts into his own words without the teacher insisting on sentences in the beginning. He will encourage the child to recognize which, and to think about what he wishes to say. This process usually results in sentences.

PROGRAM 6

IMPROVING SPEECH

Speech is but one element of language; a primary one interrelated with other elements. Writing which necessitates reading has arisen from the need to translate speech into visual form. The relationship is a mutual one, and attempts to read and write can be used to improve the quality of speech. A good activity for this is the practise of dictation. The the child dictates the story to the teacher who prints it as the child watches. Speech is more effective if it is interesting. One requirement of interesting speech is a wide vocabulary. Vocabulary can be built up in an effective and interesting way if the teacher uses the daily experiences of the classroom. A variety of experiences introduce children to many, new and varied words. The good teacher takes from the children, the words which are important to them for word study.

PROGRAM 7

READING AND LANGUAGE

Perhaps the first task of the teacher in dealing with reading skills is to help children understand the relationship between reading and the other elements of language. A teacher may, for instance, begin the day with a listening experience. Oral and visual experiences may then arise from the listening. The class may discuss a picture book, hearing the story, looking at the pictures and words, and discussing what they saw and heard. From this point the class may proceed into activities suited to their needs. One group, not yet ready to read, may watch a filmstrip without captions. They may then try to "write" in a creative manner the story which they "saw", perhaps by picture-making.

Pupil-dictation is another activity which involves all elements of language. So reading begins informally, often with child-made or teacher-made materials. It begins first in the attempt to establish the relationship with other language abilities so that it may be seen by the child as a natural part of language.

PROGRAM 8

READING SKILLS

Informal reading experience provides children with a rote-knowledge of reading-memory is the major part of such a learning process. But intelligent and confident reading demands that children have the ability to decipher new words. Thus most teachers believe that a program which helps children develop word-attack skills is essential. They also believe that it is important to know a useful sequence of reading skills. There is flexibility in any such sequence. The pacing of teaching such skills must be decided by a pupil's ability to incorporate them. For this reason, teaching reading skills is a very important part of learning in the primary grades. The teaching is often informal and is done when there is a need for the skill. Teachers seldom take the time of the whole class to teach these skills. Often a small group has a common need. In other words, phonetic analysis, structural analysis and other skills necessary in the development of reading ability are taught as a discrete, external program. They are taught continuously, as the needs arise. Most teachers' guides for reading series, in the Primary Division, give information about these skills. By teaching the skills in this informal but functional way, it is particularly necessary for teachers, to be familiar with the skills. This knowledge enables us to diagnose reading problems as they appear, to provide the necessary help and to ensure that all the skills are eventually incorporated.

PROGRAM 9

READING INDEPENDENTLY

Reading implies much more than an ability to recognize words. We have to know what words mean, we have to know how and when to use words, we have to know that words in some contexts alter

their meaning; in brief, we have to study. This is particularly important because, words, when put together in sentences and paragraphs have extended and enlarged meanings. Reading involves also an ability to comprehend the author's meaning; it demands an ability to make inferences, to make comparisons, and to make judgments. So the teacher will use the reading materials; basal readers, full length books, and other printed materials to provide learning experiences to help children develop the more complex skills involved in reading. Some such experiences will be formal, others will be informal. Children should know that any "practising" or formal experiences are used only to help them gain "expertise" and increase their independence. Frequent practice done on an individual basis is often more beneficial and rewarding for a child.

PROGRAM 10

WRITING

Writing begins with the child's understanding that he can express his ideas and thoughts in visual form, a form that can be interpreted by others. It often begins, therefore, in creative activities such as picture-making sculpture or dramatization which encourages the child to express himself visually, and which prepares him for the actual task of writing. Dictation takes him a step further. As he dictates the story, the teacher writes it down and he sees that his ideas can be written in a visual way which is more precise than picture-making. As a child begins to write or print, the thoughts and words for his creative writing will come from his experiences. Vocabulary building activities, growing naturally out of his experiences, will help him write more easily. Further encouragement to write can often be achieved when writing centres are established, when his efforts are shared during the evaluation period, when he reads his writings to an audience, his classmates. Writing requires certain skills beyond imagination and vocabulary. There is, for instance, a need for punctuation to help make our meaning more clear. Teachers will help children to learn how to use punctuation functionally. Eventually, certain guiding rules may be discovered and developed; instruction will be given when it is needed.

PROGRAM 11

LANGUAGE FOR LEARNING

Language is not a subject taught in isolation. It is functional, the heart of all learning. Thus it is the basis of learning in science, mathematics, social studies, and so on. Children use the language skills to do research, to discuss projects among themselves, to write their reports, to tell others what they have found. The mastery of language enables children to respond, in a satisfying way, to stimulii — for instance, the curiosity aroused by a group of tent caterpillars or the birth of a chick. It allows them to write letters asking for information, to plan interesting projects together, etc. So learning experiences give meaning to the language experiences, and provide a reason for acquiring language skills. The child puts his language ability to direct use. The use of language in learning activities, in the various areas of the curriculum, provides meaningful opportunity for practice in the language skills and helps the child develop ability to use language effectively.

PROGRAM 12

PLAN FOR LEARNING

Planning in the experience-centered classroom demands an approach which is considerably different from that of the more formal classroom. With no "curriculum outlines", with no subject divisions, the teacher has to consider his planning in an entirely new light. If the subject matter or content is based on the childrens' experiences and interests, these become the materials for learning, often changing from day-to-day. Except in a general sense, his planning cannot be done on a long-range basis. Furthermore he will plan, not only for the whole class, but more often for the individual. So planning in this type of classroom involves the following:

(a) diagnostic testing (formal and informal) to discover the needs of the child,

(b) activities based on the child's needs must be related to the child's interests, abilities and experiences,

(c) experiences; making use of the child's normal experiences, and providing wide variety of classroom experiences.

PROGRAM 13

THE TIME-TABLE

The daily organization for learning seems to follow a pattern in most experience-centered classrooms. The day begins with a sharing period — a time when children tell about the things that interest them and plan their activities for the day. This is followed by the activity period, during which time the children work in groups or as individuals on a variety of activities. They may work at science centres, painting-centres, mathematics-centres, or writing-centres. It is during this time that the teacher works with individuals and small groups to give the kind of concentrated attention in the development of skills which this type of program encourages and permits. After the activity period, comes the evaluation time when the children share with the teacher and their peers the results of their efforts during the morning. The afternoon may be devoted to listening experiences, project-work, story-telling, creative activities, and more individual teaching by the teacher. But there is nothing mandatory in such a pattern. The pattern should evolve and change to fit the needs of the individual and the class. Patterns can be both useful and limiting.

PROGRAM 14

EVALUATING PROGRESS

How does a teacher know if learning is taking place? How do we know if the

activities in which children are involved are producing any learning? In other words how do we evaluate the progress of the children? In the experience-centered classroom much of the evaluation is done informally. The teacher working with an individual observes the child; her questions bring responses from the child which helps her to judge his progress; and from her observations she can decide in what areas the child may need special attention. So her planning may be based very much on her informal observations. Such evaluation requires a high level of competence and diagnostic ability. Most teachers supplement the informal evaluation with the more precise measurement of formal testing. For the most part, this kind of testing is diagnostic, and it is used not for passing or failing, or for reporting to parents, but only as a basis for discussion. Primarily it is used for determining the kind of activity or experience a child might profit from next. Most teachers also keep careful records for their own information of the child's progress.

PROGRAM 15

THE EXPERIENCE-CENTERED CLASSROOM

What kind of classroom is the experience-centered one? What is it like for a child to be in one? What is it like for the teacher? Teachers say that the freer, more informal, less structured, busier atmosphere results in a new kind of relationship between teacher and child; it is a more personal one which is much more satisfying for both. The teacher's role in this kind of classroom changes; she is a friend, and guide, a resource person, and, sometimes even, a fellow-learner. For some it is not an easy kind of classroom; the lack of formal structure makes planning more difficult. Instead of planning a lesson for a whole class or for two or three groups, the teacher is planning for each individual child. And there is no doubt that this kind of classroom is noisier. And for many teachers this noise is hard to get used to. For some it is hard to realize that learning can take place. It requires imagination on the part of the teacher to provide the experiences which are an integral part of the program. It requires great organizational and planning ability to make sure that the experiences lead to learning. It is, in fact, more difficult to teach in the experience-centered classroom than in a more formal, structured room. But the same teachers who tell about the difficulties of this way of working, tell also, that they have no intention of giving it up. The rewards in terms of pupil growth and enthusiasm for learning are too great.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT
Language & Learning
15 programs, 20 minutes each

Prog. No.	CBC 9:20-9:40	CHCH 9:50-10:10	CKCO 9:20-9:40	CJOH 12:20-12:40	CBOT 9:20-9:40	CKLW 9:20-9:40
1	OCT. 19	OCT. 19	OCT. 19	OCT. 19	OCT. 19	OCT. 19
2	OCT. 26	OCT. 26	OCT. 26	OCT. 26	OCT. 26	OCT. 26
3	NOV. 2	NOV. 2	NOV. 2	NOV. 2	NOV. 2	NOV. 2
4	NOV. 9	NOV. 9	NOV. 9	NOV. 9	NOV. 9	NOV. 9
5	NOV. 23	NOV. 16	NOV. 23	NOV. 23	NOV. 23	NOV. 23
6	DEC. 7	NOV. 23	DEC. 7	DEC. 7	DEC. 7	DEC. 7
7	DEC. 14	NOV. 30	DEC. 14	DEC. 14	DEC. 14	DEC. 14
8	JAN. 11	DEC. 7	JAN. 11	JAN. 11	JAN. 11	JAN. 11
9	JAN. 18	DEC. 14	JAN. 18	JAN. 18	JAN. 18	JAN. 18
10	JAN. 25	JAN. 11	JAN. 25	JAN. 25	JAN. 25	JAN. 25
11	FEB. 1	JAN. 20	FEB. 1	FEB. 1	FEB. 1	FEB. 11
12	FEB. 8	JAN. 25	FEB. 8	FEB. 8	FEB. 8	FEB. 8
13	FEB. 15	FEB. 1	FEB. 15	FEB. 15	FEB. 15	FEB. 15
14	FEB. 22	FEB. 8	FEB. 22	FEB. 22	FEB. 22	FEB. 22
15	MAR. 1	FEB. 15	MAR. 1	MAR. 1	MAR. 1	MAR. 1

LANGUAGE AND LEARNING